

Keeping local food affordable:

Using your
SNAP benefits
at a farmers
market



“Local food” is a term we hear a lot about lately.

- What do we mean when we say local food?
- What are the differences between food from the supermarket and food from the farmers market? How are they similar?



What are the benefits of shopping at the farmers market?

- You can use your SNAP benefits
- Some markets have matching fund programs to stretch your food budget
- Produce is very fresh and high in nutrients
- It's fun!
- Children may be encouraged to try new foods



How to navigate the market



1) Take a walk around the market to compare prices and see what each vendor is selling. Most farmers price their produce at about the same price, but check and see who has the best looking produce.

2) Visit the EBT stand at the manager's table and get your tokens. There may also be recipes and other information available. Now you can shop!

3) Feel free to ask questions, both at the manager's table and to the vendors. Ask about produce if you don't recognize it or know how to cook it- everyone does! Farmers love to talk about their produce.

How to use your SNAP card at the market:

- 1) Find the market manager's information table. Look for signs that say "Use your EBT card here."
- 2) The manager will swipe your EBT card for the amount you request. You will receive \$1 wooden tokens. These tokens act like cash in the market.
- 3) Use your tokens to buy fruit, vegetables, meat, eggs, herbs, baked goods, seeds and more!
- 4) Tokens don't expire, so hold on to them for your next visit if you have any left over.



How to use your EBT card at the market:

- At some markets, each farmer will have an EBT machine, so there are no tokens and you pay each farmer with your EBT card.
- Most markets use the token system though, so look for the information table to ask the first time you go.



Budgeting for the market

Budgeting for the farmers market is a bit different than the supermarket.



- Compare prices between vendors when you “do a lap.” Most will be about the same price, but keep an eye out for the best quality.
- You can use the fact that tokens don’t expire to help you budget – take out a good amount in the beginning of the month and use them over time.
- Ask the market manager if you are interested in buying in bulk, or buying “seconds” (slightly blemished produce) at a cheaper price. They can point you to a farmer who does this.
- Haggling over prices isn’t recommended.

I'm not a great cook yet . . .

- Don't worry! You do not have to be a master chef to add more fresh fruits and vegetables to your diet.
- Start slow by adding to what you already eat: top frozen pizza with zucchini, add broccoli to the pasta when you make macaroni and cheese, sauté some bell peppers and carrots to add to your instant noodles. Add a bit here and there!



What are the differences between shopping at the supermarket and a farmers market?



- **Seasonality.** Some farmers markets only have produce which is grown in that particular season. For example: asparagus and strawberries will only be found in the spring.
- What food is available at farmers markets vary depending on the **location**. For example, oranges may not be available in Virginia.

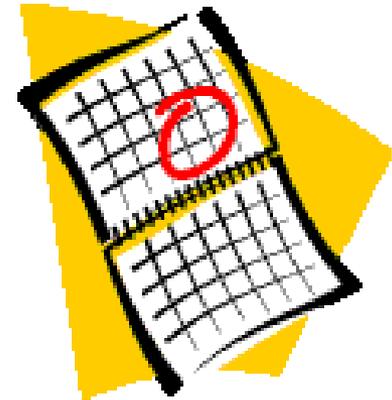
What are the differences between shopping at the supermarket and a farmers market?

- **Physical layout.** Each farmers market is set up differently. Some are tents, some are in wooden structures.
- While supermarkets are always inside, some farmers markets are **outside**. Some are covered, some are not. So you might be exposed to the sun or rain.



What are the differences between shopping at the supermarket and a farmers market?

- **The schedule** will be different. Most farmers market are not open 7 days a week. Check the schedule for your local farmers market.



- **The price** may be less for certain items and more for others than at the supermarket. Fruits and vegetables will generally cost the same or less than the supermarket.

What can you find at the market?

- Each market is different, but most sell fruit, vegetables, eggs, herbs, meat and baked goods.
- The produce is local, which means it is seasonal. Knowing what is in season can help you have a general plan of what to buy.
- Make sure if there is something you really want to buy, you buy it first! Sometimes things sell out.



Differences in food from the farmers market

- Food is less processed. There may be “greens” on your carrots and dirt on your potatoes.
- Always wash your produce before eating.
- “Greens” on carrots and beets can be eaten! Sauté with olive oil and garlic. Ask the farmer if you aren’t sure.



Differences in food from the farmers market

- Chickens from the market are usually whole. Roast them, or make soup.
- When you aren't sure how to cook a vegetable, roasting it on a baking sheet in the oven at 350 degrees with olive oil, salt, pepper and garlic is usually an easy answer. Mix it up with different herbs, lemon juice, or nuts for new tastes.



Did you know?



- You can use your SNAP benefits to buy seeds and seedlings for plants that grow food!
- Using a bit of your SNAP budget to buy seeds and seedlings is a great way to stretch your food budget. Start small with a few plants in pots and grow from there!

I'm interested! How do I find my local farmer's market?

- You can look it up online at:

<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/vagrown/index.shtml>

- More and more markets and roadside stands are accepting SNAP, so if you see a market don't be afraid to stop and ask!





The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is an equal opportunity provider and employer. This material is funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP which provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, contact your county or city Department of Social Services or to locate your county office call toll-free: 1-800-552-3431 (M-F 8:15-5:00, except holidays). By calling your local DSS office, you can get other useful information about services.



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